

ASTRAL BODY

In the general treatment of the Astral Body there seems to be some kind of doubt as to its nature and existence. Does every man possess an astral body? If so, is it located in space and time or within the body or outside the body, or is it an inseparable part of the body. In what senses is it a body.

These questions and many more crop up whenever we try to deal with the subject.

Every person possesses the astral body which gives a reading of the psychic condition of the individual soul. It is a near body as contrasted with the physical/gross body. When the gross body dies, the astral body is said to be the transmigrating one along with the soul. But it does also go away when the individual soul gets rid of the karmas and vasanas and trishnas absolutely. Indeed it is a karana sarira in the sense that once this forms then the rest of the formations follow. Since it dissolves (siryate) or falls to pieces ultimately it is a sarira or body. Thus it is called karana sarira.

But it is in a sense located within the body being very

suksma and also an atomic thing. It is an atomic conglomerate or aggregation or skandha. Some hold that it is a conglomerate of manas, suksma indriyas, ahamkara and buddhi. The atomic nature of each of the components would however entail quite a sizeable sarira. Does it by any means mean that it is of the size of the thumb (angustamatra purusah) for it is described so even in the Savitri episode when the soul of Satyavan was taken out of the body by Yama with his pasa, binding rope?

Some make manas a vibhu or vast whereas some make it anu (minute). Some make the soul vibhu but somehow claim that it can be bound by manas etc., entities. Undoubtedly Buddha denied the soul behind the conglomerate though he did not affirm as to what was left after the break up of the skandha or aggregate.

Whatever may be the condition, the astral body is within the physical body and is limited by it in such a way that there is no freedom for it except when it is released by the physical during dreams or when it is in some sense taken out of the physical body in trance states or yogic or occult states. In dreams thus the subtle senses, manas, ahamkara act as if without any limitations of space or time. In fact though the images are all taken from the

physical world yet the activities specially break all laws of the physical. It is from the analogy of the dream state that the seers tried to liberate the astral body and deal with it directly in yoga. This of course is not so much as known by the Vedantins or even the modern yogins.

Sri Ramchandraji Maharaj has shown how from the very first, one must deal with the astral or karana sarira of the abhyasi and liberate it from the thraldom to its physical gross body. The effect cannot cure the cause but the cause can cure the effect.

Another conception of the astral body may be given from the Indian philosophic standpoint. The antahkarana or internal organ of knowledge is said to comprise the buddhi (intellect), ahamkara (will or egoity) and manas (the principle of distinguishing feelings of pleasure or pain), and the citta (the whole series of modifications which go by the name of ideation, imagination). These also include the functions of memory. But obviously our consciousness as at present constituted is the awareness that we have of the world outside us and our memories of it which we get through our sense organs and motor organs. Indeed the antahkarana depends for its knowledge of the outer world on these sense and motor organs. However the Upanishads call this awareness of

the outer world, Jagrat, waking consciousness, and the states of mind when the motor organs do not function the dream consciousness. Obviously even the sense organs do not function. Only the antahkarana begins to function with the memory materials already got from the senses. That is the reason for our experiencing the dreams in a sensory manner. The complete absence of sensory experiences is the susupti or deep sleep.

The reason for our forgetting experiences may most probably be due to the sinking of all experiences into this deep sleep state. This may be caused by our fears and complexes which inhibit our memory. This need not detain us of course, for we are very much concerned with the astral form which might well be called the central body with the nucleus of our experience.

That we can have clearer idea of the internal condition and status of a man through the astral than the physical is the considered opinion of the investigators into spiritual life. In this sense the growth or distortion of the individual are perceived through the internal organ and not through the external organs.

It is possible to observe the astral form or project the

astral form out of the physical body too. It is not possible to do the same with regard to the physical. Spatial and temporal limitations are much fewer than the physical in respect of the astral. It is because it can be the transmigrator from one body to another at death and does keep its individuality that it is possible also to deal with it in its dreams and deep sleep states through the astral.

The reason for much of the spiritual work to be done during the deep sleep of the abhyasi or the Samadhi condition or the deep dhyana shows that what real transformation can be done is only during the period of the astral life. The Upanishad calls the state as the condition that when one is at one with the Divine which is the self and substrate of its being. Further this capacity for the astral being to be called up anywhere and from anywhere or considered apart from its physical being or becoming shows that is sarva-gata. Some schools of philosophies consider the soul to be all pervading or vibhu on account of its capacity to be anywhere it is called or led upto. This may be also in respect of other worlds or levels of life also.